

**From:** [Alex Baca](#)  
**To:** [peter\\_may@nps.gov](mailto:peter_may@nps.gov); [DCOZ - ZC Submissions \(DCOZ\)](#)  
**Subject:** clarification on motivation behind providing comments  
**Date:** Monday, June 26, 2023 8:44:46 PM

---

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the DC Government. Do not click on links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know that the content is safe. If you believe that this email is suspicious, please forward to [phishing@dc.gov](mailto:phishing@dc.gov) for additional analysis by OCTO Security Operations Center (SOC).

Dear Commissioner May,

I'm responsible for the generation of a good number of the comments on the record for ZC 23-02, in my role as Greater Greater Washington's D.C. policy director. Given some of your comments about the "pretty exceptional" volume of submissions to the record for this case at this evening's meeting, I wanted to write you with additional perspective.

It brings me, quite frankly, no pleasure to organize people to submit comments on individual projects like this. From time to time, I do so because it is the most effective way to advance the goals (which include more homes, and more income-restricted, subsidized homes, in Washington, D.C.) of the organization I work for; in the past two years, I've submitted comments on only two cases, Dance Loft and 1617 U, in my professional capacity. While most of GGWash's supporters are happy to engage when I ask them to and when I give them clear instructions on how to do so, I know that showing up to support individual projects, repeatedly, when you've continually voted for elected representatives who have promised to support more homes in the District, is not a gratifying experience. A lot of people just want a greater range of options when they need to make a choice about housing, which necessarily requires more homes to be built here, and they are less motivated to speak in favor of something that they expect should be happening already than those with [negative feelings](#) toward new development are motivated to protest.

I appreciate that you noted that there are unfounded concerns underlying some comments the commission has received, because, while GGWash has a firm bias toward upzoning these sites, we have never, ever intentionally published or otherwise conveyed inaccurate information about ZC 23-02. I won't even *suggest* that upzoning will make housing more affordable anymore, because even though [nearly no academic research finds otherwise](#), it doesn't always match people's lived experiences. I am lucky that I am paid to work on topics that I am personally deeply invested in, but accurately communicating the components of a zoning case is not actually so difficult that it requires one to work full-time. Some people will make honest mistakes in their interpretation of a proposed map amendment or a set-down report, of course, but some people are intentionally misleading others and organizing participation in the commission's public-input process on that basis. More outreach and more "effective communication," while good praxis, will not change this dynamic.

So, a lot of comments on a zoning case does not mean that the "community" is particularly passionate one way or the other. Close to 100,000 people live within a half-mile of 1617 U; it is absurd to think that that many people would collectively agree on anything, and it is foolhardy to think that more education is, somehow, a ticket to getting them to do so. A lot of comments on a zoning case *does* mean that the leaders of certain ideological camps—including me, of my own—are reacting strongly to it or to each other, and tapping their bases accordingly. I've watched enough zoning commission hearings to know that when

commissioners see a slew of negative comments on a case, they think, or at least act like, public sentiment toward that case *is* negative. It's my job to remind you that you'll never, ever truly have a grasp on public sentiment, and one way in which I can do that is to counter the opposition that inevitably appears in land-use scuffles—especially bad-faith opposition that intentionally misrepresents a case's merits, *and* its flaws—with the [support that exists for more housing generally](#). With about 4,000 subscribers in the District on our email list, GWash's base is small enough for me to get a handle on, and I can confidently say that the majority of those who receive our calls to action buck the commonly held view on new housing, which is that it should exist—[just not near the person](#) who's being [asked whether or not it should exist](#). I'm deeply proud of our constituency for its graciousness.

It's always been my understanding that, per the amended Zoning Act of 1920, the commission is charged with "preparing, adopting, and subsequently amending the Zoning Regulations and Zoning Map in a means not inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan for the National Capital area." Despite new language in the amended 2006 Comp Plan locating the role of public input in the zoning process, the Future Land Use Map designation for 1617 U and 1620 V is still high-density, and Office of Planning's proposed zone, MU-10, is not inconsistent with that FLUM designation. I don't see the whether the commission feels more or less comfortable about the volume of input, or the content of comments, as relevant to its core duty.

I know that commissioners cannot comment on ongoing cases, and don't expect a response from you addressing any specifics of ZC 23-02, though I've cced [zcsubmissions@dc.gov](mailto:zcsubmissions@dc.gov) to be sure that this is added to the record. I'm always happy to discuss my thoughts on public input; it is, after all, my job to be well aware of the opportunities and drawbacks of engagement. While I was pleased to see the commission delay ZC 23-02 tonight because of OP's failure to properly notice nearby residents, I want to be clear that people are not generally submitting comments on cases out of a wellspring of civic pride, or because they would do so routinely. It's because we organize them, and this case is a very, very juicy one to organize around.

Thanks very much for your service and your time.

Alex

--

Alex Baca  
D.C. Policy Director  
[Greater Greater Washington](#)  
[abaca@ggwash.org](mailto:abaca@ggwash.org) / (410) 562-5597 / she, they  
[Support our work.](#)

"...driving may kill a lot of people, but it also helps a lot of people get to work on time, so, it;s impossible to say if its bad or not," —[@dril, 2014](#), and, also, in essence, many American political leaders